



PCT

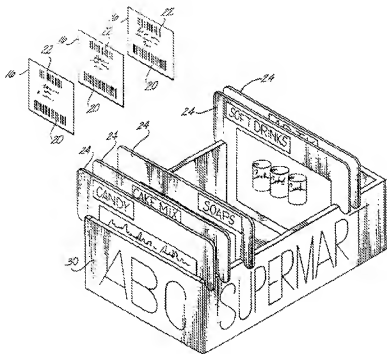
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(21) International Application Number: PCT/US94/05605 (22) International Filing Date: 19 May 1994 (19.05.94) (30) Priority Data: 08/065,218 19 May 1993 (19.05.93) US (71)(72) Applicant and Inventor: HYUN, David, K. [US/US]; 655 North Sunny Slope Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91107 (US). (74) Agent: RAHN, LeRoy, T.; Christie, Parker & Hale, P.O. Box 7068, Pasadena, CA 91109-7068 (US).	(81) Designated States: AT, AU, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, GB, HU, JP, KP, KR, KZ, LK, LU, LV, MG, MN, MW, NL, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SK, UA, UZ, VN, European patent (AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, ES, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG). Published <i>With international search report.</i>	

(54) Title: METHOD AND PRODUCT FOR ORGANIZING, STORING AND TRACKING CENTS-OFF COUPONS**(57) Abstract**

A bar code (20) uniquely identifying a single user or user group is printed on a plurality of cents-off coupons (16) naming various products. A plurality of file dividers (24) are inserted in a coupon storage container (30) to form separate compartments for coupon storage. The coupons are placed in the compartments sorted by product. The coupons are selectively removed from the compartments for the purpose of redemption. The bar code printed on the coupons is optically read (32) in the course of purchasing products named on the coupons to generate data about the user or user group. The divider cards can also have printed thereon a bar code (20) uniquely identifying the user or user group. The coupons and/or divider cards can have printed thereon a bar code (22, 29) identifying the particular product named on the respective coupons and/or divider cards.



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METHOD AND PRODUCT FOR ORGANIZING, STORING AND TRACKING CENTS-OFF COUPONS

Background of the Invention

This invention relates to merchandising, advertising and consumer research vehicles and, more particularly, to a method and product for organizing, storing and tracking cents-off coupons.

U.S. Patent 4,795,196 discloses a method for organizing cents-off coupons and a coupon storage device that offer the opportunity to advertise name brand products and retail businesses. Specifically, a plurality of file divider cards fit in a coupon storage bin to form separate compartments in which coupons for different generic products are stored. Generic product descriptors are printed on one area of the respective file dividers. Different brand name product advertisements are printed on another area of the respective file dividers. The brand name product belongs to the class of a generic product, the descriptor of which is printed on the same divider as the advertisement of the brand name product. For example, an advertisement for Campbell's soups might be printed on a divider card on which the product descriptor "SOUPS" is printed. All the coupons for soups regardless of brand would be stored in the compartment behind this file divider. The name of a particular merchant is also preferably printed on the container. Thus, the file dividers present the opportunity to advertise brand name products and the coupon storage bin presents the opportunity to advertise a merchant.

U.S. Patent 5,060,793 discloses a coupon storage device kit for use in practicing the method of the '196 patent. The kit comprises a substantially flat blank foldable into a storage bin and a plurality of divider sheets of defined divider cards for the storage bin. Preferably the blank and the divider sheets are wrapped in a plastic cover with sheets of cents-off coupons and the kit has external dimensions that permit it to be placed in a conventional brown paper shopping bag. The described kit is a convenient way to distribute the coupon storage device to consumers.

To improve the effectiveness of their marketing efforts, consumer product manufacturers and their advertising agencies expend substantial time and effort generating and analyzing data about the habits and practices of potential consumers of their products. Although such data is of great value, it is frequently costly and difficult to generate reliable data.

Summary of the Invention

The invention employs bar codes to track cents-off coupons so that consumer data can be generated when the coupons are redeemed.

One aspect of the invention is a method for organizing and tracking cents-off coupons. A bar code uniquely identifying a single user or user group is printed on a plurality of cents-off coupons naming various products. A plurality of file dividers are inserted in a coupon storage container to form separate compartments for coupon storage. The coupons are placed in the compartments sorted by product. The coupons are selectively removed from the compartments for the purpose of redemption. The bar code printed on the coupons is optically read in the course of purchasing

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products named on the coupons to generate data about the user or user group.

Another aspect of the invention is a kit for storing cents-off coupons in an organized manner. A substantially flat blank is foldable into a storage bin. A plurality of divider sheets each have defined therein at least one divider card. The divider cards from the plurality of dividers sheets are insertable into the storage bin, thus separating the storage bin into individual compartments. A bar code uniquely identifying a single user or user group is printed on a plurality of cents-off coupons. Preferably, the blank, the divider sheets, and the coupons are wrapped in a plastic cover and are dimensioned to fit into a conventional brown paper shopping bag.

As a feature of the invention, the divider cards can also have printed thereon a bar code uniquely identifying the user or user group.

As another feature of the invention, the coupons and/or divider cards can have printed thereon a bar code identifying the particular product named on the respective coupons and/or divider cards.

The described system enables product manufactures and their advertising agencies to effectively advertise their products and to track consumer habits and practices.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The features of specific embodiments of the best mode contemplated of carrying out the invention are illustrated in the drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a coupon storage device kit showing one side of the kit in its unassembled configuration.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of one of the sheets of coupons that comprise part of the kit of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of one of the sheets of dividers that comprise part of the kit of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the coupon storage device assembled from the kit of FIG. 1;

FIG. 5 is a front and back view of a registration card that comprises part of the kit of FIG. 1; and

FIG. 6 is a schematic diagram of a point of sale terminal reading the bar codes on a coupon from the kit of FIG. 1.

Detailed Description of the Specific Embodiment

The disclosures of U.S. Patents 4,795,196 and 5,060,793 are hereby incorporated fully by reference.

In FIG. 1 is shown a consumer product coupon storage device kit which comprises a blank 10, a plurality of divider sheets 11, and one or more sheets of cents-off coupons 12 wrapped in a transparent plastic cover 13. A registration card 14 is secured to the outside of cover 13 by glue, staples, or other means. Preferably, the kit has exterior dimensions that permit it to be placed in a conventional brown paper shopping bag 15 for carrying by the consumer. An identical registration card (not shown) is also included inside plastic cover 13 as a backup to card 14. A bar code 20 is printed on the surface of plastic cover 13. Bar code 20 represents a particular user or user group, preferably in UPC. A unique bar code is used for a particular user or user group such as a group of users in a certain geographic location or users having a certain ethnic background or income characteristics. Every other user or user group has its own unique bar code so that the buying patterns of the various users and user groups can be tracked.

As shown in FIG. 2, sheet 12 comprises a plurality of cents-off coupons 16 framed by perforations 18 to facilitate separation of the individual coupons from sheet 12. The names of different brand name products are printed on coupons 16. When the consumer shops in a retail establishment, the consumer separates the coupons for the brand name products he or she purchases and redeems the coupons to claim a price discount.

The same user or user group unique bar code 20 is also printed on each of coupons 16. An optional bar code 22, which is different for each brand name product, is also printed on coupons 16. Bar code 22 identifies the particular brand name printed on the coupon, preferably in UPC.

As shown in FIG. 3, divider sheets 11 each preferably have four individual file dividers 24 printed thereon. File dividers 24 are framed by perforations 26 to facilitate separation from sheet 11. Dividers 24 are dimensioned to fit into the interior space of a storage bin described below, which is assembled from blank 10 in the manner described in U.S. Patent 5,060,793.

Each divider 24 has a first visible field 27 adjacent to the top edge of the divider and a second field 28 that covers most of the rest of the surface of the divider. A different generic product descriptor is printed in the first field 27 of each divider. A brand name product advertisement is printed in the second field 28 of each divider. The brand name product belongs to the class of the generic product descriptor printed on the divider. For example, FIG. 3 shows divider cards having generic product descriptors of "SOFT DRINKS," "CAKE MIX," "CANDY" AND "SOAP." The advertisement printed on the divider having a generic descriptor of "SOFT DRINKS" is for COCA COLA brand soft drink. The back of each of the dividers (not shown in the drawings) has a field covering most of the back surface in which a brand name product advertisement is also printed. The brand name product can belong to the class of generic product, the descriptor which is printed on the same divider card as the advertisement of said brand name product, or to the class of the generic product, the descriptor of which is printed on the next adjacent or nearby divider card. Preferably, the same user or user group unique bar code 20 is also printed on each of dividers 28. An optional bar code 29, which is different for each brand name product, is also printed on dividers 16. Bar code

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29 identifies the particular brand name advertised on the divider, preferably in UPC. Bar codes 22 and 29 could be printed on the rear side of the dividers, instead of the front side thereof. After a designated date, the dividers are redeemable as coupons. This encourages the consumer to use the dividers as coupons and to obtain a new kit with new coupons and product advertisements. As a result, the described system can be used to introduce new product advertisements on a periodic basis.

Registration card 14 is shown in detail in FIG. 5. The front of registration card 14 has the characteristics of a standard post card—i.e., an addressee, a return address, and a prepaid postage stamp. The back of registration card 14 has the same user or user group unique bar code 20, blanks for the consumer's name and address, and other consumer relevant data such as family size. The consumer is preferably encouraged to mail in the back up registration card with a premium or prize. This permits the issuer of the kits to associate the name and address of the consumer with the unique bar code 20 that is used on his or her kit.

If the kits are distributed at food markets or other retail establishments, the consumer presents his or her kit to the checker at the point of sale in the course of the sales transaction. The checker passes the kit over the optical reader to read bar code 20 on registration card 14 and/or cover 15 and to enter the consumer into the store computer as part of the sales transaction. This provides to the issuers of the coupons proof of the delivery of the coupons to the consumer and thus protects against misredemption of coupons.

To use the kit, the consumer assembles a coupon storage bin 30 from blank 10 as shown in FIG. 4. The consumer also separates file dividers 24 from sheet 11 and places the dividers in bin 10. The top corners of dividers 24 each have downwardly extending hooks that with the remainder of the side edges of the card form notches. The top of the bin has side edges which serve as rails to guide and support dividers 24 as they move parallel to the length of bin 10 and thereby adjust the size of the individual compartments. Bin 10 is deeper than the height of divider cards 24 from the bottom edge to the recess of the notches so that the bottom edge of dividers 24 do not rest on the bottom of bin 10. This serves to hold divider cards 24 in an upright position, i.e. vertical. The consumer then separates coupons 16 from sheet 12 and places coupon 16 in the compartments sorted by product, i.e. the coupons shown in FIG. 4 being in the soap compartment are coupons for different brands of soap. When the consumer shops for merchandise, the consumer selectively removes the coupons from the compartments for redemption and delivers the coupons along with the corresponding brand name merchandise to the checker at the point of sale.

As shown in FIG. 6, the checker passes the coupons to be redeemed across an optical scanner 32 at a point of sale terminal to read bar code 20 and optional bar codes 22 and 29. This data is transmitted to a store computer 34 for storage, tabulation, and eventual analysis of the purchasing habits and practices of the user or user group identified by the unique bar code.

The described embodiment of the invention is only considered to be preferred and illustrative of the inventive concept; the scope of the invention is not to be restricted to such embodiments. Various and numerous other arrangements may be devised by one skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of this invention.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of organizing and tracking cents-off coupons comprising the steps of:
printing on a plurality of product cents-off coupons naming various products a bar code
5 uniquely identifying a single user or user group;
inserting a plurality of file dividers in a container to form separate compartments for
coupon storage;
placing the coupons in the compartments sorted by product;
selectively removing the coupons from the compartments for the purpose of redemption;
10 and
optically reading the bar code printed on the coupons in the course of purchasing
products named by the coupons to generate data about the user or user group.
2. The method of claim 1, additionally comprising the steps of:
15 printing on an area of the respective file dividers different generic product descriptors;
and
printing on another area of the respective dividers different brand-name product
advertisements, the brand-name product belonging to the class of the generic product, the descriptor
of which is printed on the same divider as the advertisement of said brand-name product.
20
3. The method of claim 2, additionally comprising the steps of:
printing on yet another area of the dividers a bar code uniquely identifying the user or
user group; selectively removing the dividers from the container for the purpose of
redemption; and
25 electronically reading the bar code printed on the dividers in the course of purchasing
products named on the coupons to generate data about the user or user group.
4. The method of claim 2, additionally comprising the step of tabulating the data.
5. The method of claim 3, additionally comprising the step of analyzing the purchasing
30 characteristics of the user or user group from the data.
6. A consumer-product coupon storage device comprising:
a coupon storage bin having an open top with side edges and a cubical interior space;
35 a plurality of dividers adapted to fit in the bin to separate the space in the bin into
individual compartments, each divider having first and second visible fields;
a plurality of product cents-off coupons on which a bar code uniquely identifying a
single user or user group is printed;
a generic product descriptor printed in the first field of each divider; and
40 a brand-name product advertisement printed in the second field of each divider, the

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brand-name product belonging to the class of the generic product, the descriptor of which is printed on a divider near the advertisement of said brand-name product.

5 7. The storage device of claim 5, in which each descriptor is printed on the same divider as the advertisement of said brand-name product.

 8. The storage device of claim 5, in which the bin has at least one visible field on its outer surface and a retail business advertisement is printed in said field.

10 9. The storage device of claim 5, in which the bin has four side faces and one bottom face and a retail business advertisement is printed on each face.

 10. The storage device of claim 5 in which the same retail business advertisement is printed on each face of the bin.

15 11. A kit for storing manufacturers coupons in an organized manner comprising:
 a substantially flat blank, the blank being foldable into a storage bin;
 a plurality of divider sheets, each having defined therein at least one divider card, the
 divider cards from the plurality of divider sheets being insertable into the storage bin thus separating
20 the storage bin into individual compartments; and
 a plurality of product cents-off coupons on which a bar code uniquely identifying a
 single user or user group is printed.

 12. The kit of claim 10, in which the divider sheets have printed thereon a bar code
25 uniquely identifying the user or user group.

 13. A kit for storing coupons as recited in claim 11 further comprising a plastic wrap
 embracing the blank and the plurality of divider sheets.

30 14. A kit for storing coupons as recited in claim 11 further comprising a plurality of
 manufacturer coupons insertable into the compartments formed by the storage bin and the divider
 cards.

 15. A kit for storing coupons as recited in claim 13 further comprising a plastic wrap
35 embracing the blank, the plurality of divider sheets and the plurality of manufacturer coupons.

 16. A kit for storing coupons as recited in claim 12 wherein the divider cards further
 comprise a first field for printing a generic product descriptor and a second field for printing a
 brand-name advertisement.

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17. A kit for storing coupons as recited in claim 15 wherein the brand-name advertisement on each card is directed to a product in the class of the generic product descriptor on the card.

18. A kit for storing coupons as recited in claim 12 having dimensions suitable to fit within a shopping bag or a direct mail piece envelope.

19. A kit for storing coupons as recited in claim 11 wherein the kit has exterior dimension that permit it to be placed in a conventional paper shopping bag.

20. A kit as for storing coupons as recited in claim 11 further comprising a grocery bag having an open top and a bottom surface and four side surfaces defining a cubical interior space, the grocery bag having at least one side dimensioned slightly larger than the blank to allow the blank to be inserted into and carried by the bag.

21. A consumer-product kit having component parts capable of being assembled by the consumer for providing a coupon storage device, the kit comprising the combination of:

a blank adapted to be folded into a storage bin having an open top with top edges and a cubical interior space;

a plurality of divider sheets, each sheet defining at least one removable divider card, the divider cards adapted to be fitted in the bin to separate the space in the bin into individual compartments, each divider card having a first visible field with a generic product descriptor printed therein and a second visible field with a brand-name product advertisement printed therein, each divider card also having top corners with notches into which the side edges of the bin fit; and

a plurality of coupons adapted to be placed into the compartments by the consumer, a bar code uniquely identifying a single user or user group printed on each coupon.

22. A consumer-product kit as recited in claim 21 wherein the blank is initially folded in a substantially flat configuration.

23. A consumer-product kit as recited in claim 22 wherein the blank, in its initially flat configuration, is sized to fit into a conventional shopping bag.

24. A consumer-device kit as recited in claim 21 further comprising a plastic wrap surrounding and holding together the component parts to provide an integrated kit of component parts.

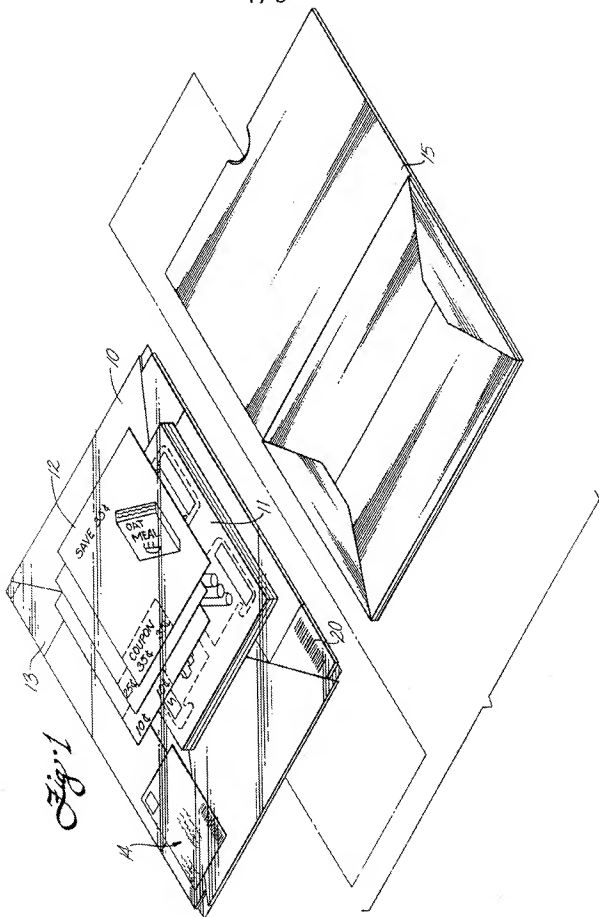
25. A kit as recited in claim 21 wherein the divider cards in the divider sheets are defined by perforations in the divider sheet so that the divider cards can be removed from the divider sheets.

26. A kit as recited in claim 21 wherein each divider sheet defines four divider cards.

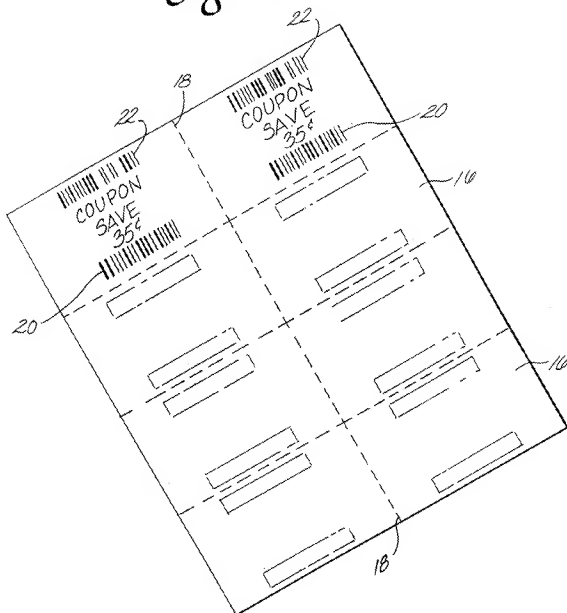
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27. A kit as recited in claim 24, additionally comprising a registration card secured to the outside of the cover, the bar code being printed on the registration card.

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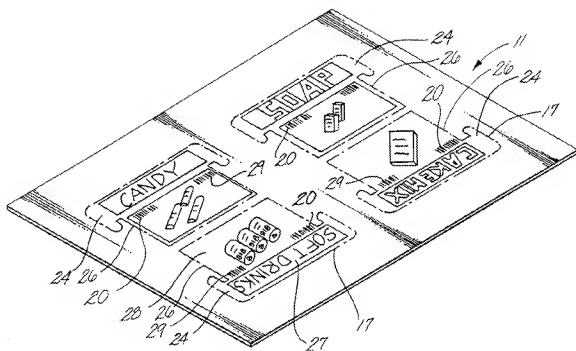


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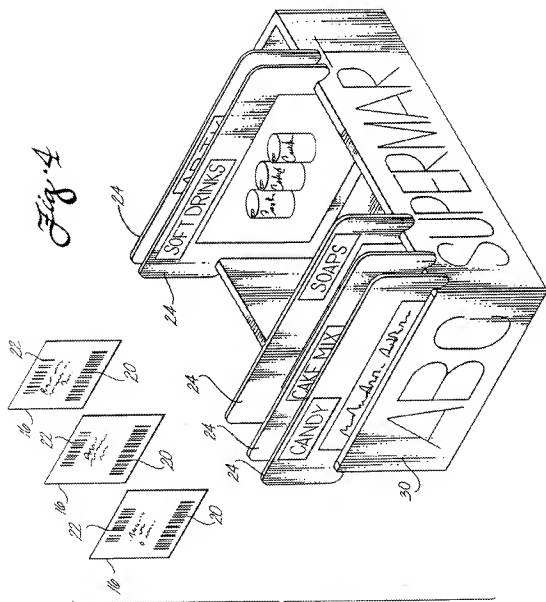
Fig. 2

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Fig. 3




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5/6

Fig. 5



POSTAGE PAID


VALUE SAVERS UNLIMITED
REGISTRATION CARD
1234 MAIN ST.
SOMEWHERE IN U.S.

VALUE SAVERS UNLIMITED
REGISTRATION CARD

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____

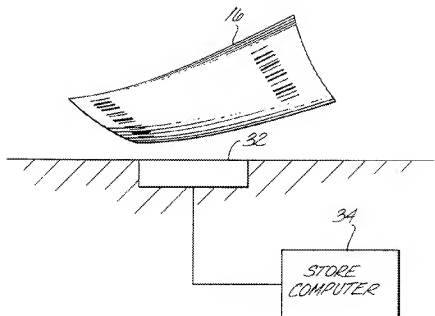
 ZIP CODE: _____

FAMILY SIZE: _____

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14

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Fig. 6

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US94/05605

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(5) : G06F 15/20; G06K 15/00

US CL : 235/375, 383

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 235/375, 383

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

APS: search terms: coupon, bar code

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US, A, 4,795,196 (HYUN ET AL) 03 JUNE 1989, col. 5, line 40 to col. 6, line 41.	1-10
Y	US, A, 5,039,075 (MAYER) 13 AUGUST 1991, col. 1, lines 32-46 and col. 4, lines 31-38.	1-27
Y	US, A, 5,060,793 (HYUN ET AL) 29 OCTOBER 1991, col. 4, line 60 to col. 6 line 22.	11-27
A	US, A, 4,908,761 (TAI) 13 MARCH 1990.	1-27

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.
 ☐ See patent family annex.

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"Y"

document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

29 AUGUST 1994

Date of mailing of the international search report

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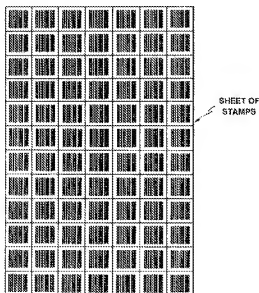
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(54) Method of identifying users of coupons.

(57) A method of identifying users of coupons includes marking a set of stamps with a code that identifies a particular user. The stamps are then distributed to the user identified by the code, and the user is instructed to secure a stamp on each coupon the user redeems when making purchases. The code is then read and entered into a database along with the identity of the item purchased.

FIG.1



The present invention relates to a new and improved method for identifying users of coupons and other documents, and more particularly, to a new and improved method for tracking users of coupons and other documents through the use of coded stamps.

Manufacturers and retailers plan what to produce and sell based on purchasing habits. This planning requires considerable data to allow an understanding of purchasing habits. Ideally, these data track the identity of an individual and the specific purchases that individual made. The data allow the establishment and maintenance of a database of purchasers by brand and by product. It is also desirable to develop a database of all of the products purchased by the individual.

One procedure for tracking purchases by an individual is typically found in the magazine industry when a subscriber resubscribes to a magazine. This is most often accomplished by a post card being included with the last magazine in an expiring subscription. If the subscriber wishes to renew his or her subscription, a mailing label is removed from the magazine and attached to the post card. In this way the post card is directly associated with a specific subscriber.

Another procedure for tracking items such as coupons, is disclosed in United States Patent No. 4,791,281. In this patent a system for processing coupons, including assembling multiple coded coupons bearing a uniquely identifiable and traceable code are collected in booklets or envelopes and are mailed to a specific individual identified on the coded coupon. The data regarding the individual receiving the coupon is entered into a database. Upon redemption of the coupons, the coupons are decoded and compared to the database to validate the coupon or cancel it. The data may be stored for demographic or geographic analysis.

A direct mail item with a reply envelope and detachable reply coupon is disclosed in United States Patent No. 4,543,082. This patent discloses direct mail articles including an outer envelope with a preformed reply envelope and detachable reply coupons or cards. The reply envelope is provided with a number of apertured pockets adapted to receive one of the reply devices. The contents of the apertured pockets can be viewed upon receipt allowing sorting of the envelopes according to the type of reply included in the pocket.

Another method of collecting response data from direct mail advertising is disclosed in United States Patent No. 4,752,675. This patent discloses a method for determining the effectiveness of a mass advertising program. In this program advertising material sent to a particular addressee is encoded with a unique identifying bar code symbol that identifies the individual receiving the material.

The material includes an invitation to each addressee to return a portion of the material containing the bar code to the sender. The returned material is read and the information is entered into a master file list or database. This information is analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the advertising.

These methods described above all require that the material sent to the consumer or user include a response item. The mailing material and the response coupon or card are typically included in the same mailing requiring the user to return a portion of the original mailed material or to attach a portion of the original mailed material to another portion and return that to the sender. As a result, the data provided is of limited value since it cannot record the unrestricted choices of a consumer in his or her purchases.

Briefly, the present invention is directed to a new and improved method for tracking items such as coupons, and specifically, to tracking the purchases made by a user of coupons. The method includes producing a set of identifiers such as stamps, and marking each stamp with a specific identifying code that corresponds to the recipient of the stamps. The marked or coded stamps are then given to the specific user with instructions for that user to secure at least one of the stamps on coupons used by that user. The coupons can come from any source, not necessarily the same source as the stamps. The user then secures stamps to coupons used in purchases, and in the redeeming process, the code on the stamps is read and entered into a database. The database can then be used to determine the types and frequency of purchases made by the user. In addition, it is possible if desired, to record all the goods purchased by the user at the same time the coupon is used. Those goods purchased without a coupon can be recorded in the database as goods purchased by the user adding additional useful data to the database.

This method provides the ability to track coupons to specific individuals, to reduce the potential for fraud associated with the redemption of the coupon, to establish and maintain a database of coupon purchases by brand and product, to develop a database of other products purchased at the same time the coupons are redeemed, the ability to target future mailings by profiling coupon respondents, and the capability of eliminating deliveries of coupons to non-responsive participants.

The above and other objects, and advantages, and novel features of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of a preferred embodiment of the invention illustrated in the accompanying drawings wherein:

Fig. 1 is an elevation view of a sheet of encoded stamps assembled in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is an elevation view of a sheet of stamps bearing a code that has not been associated with a particular user;

Fig. 3 is an elevation view of a coupon illustrating the attachment of a coded stamp; and

Fig. 4 is a flow chart illustrating the method of the present invention.

While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments thereof have been shown by way of example in the drawings and will be described in detail. It should be understood, however, that it is not intended to limit the invention to the particular forms disclosed, but on the contrary, the intention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

The present invention relates to a method for tracking the identity of individuals redeeming coupons. The source of the coupons is not a limiting factor in the implementation of the method of the present invention.

The present invention is directed to the use of stamps 10. The stamps 10 are distributed in sheets 12 to users. Examples of sheets of stamps 12 and 12A are illustrated in Figs. 1 and 2. Each stamp 10 in a sheet 12 or 12A includes indicia 14 that may be a bar code, an alpha numerical designation, or other indicia that can be printed or otherwise applied to each stamp 10. The stamps 10 may be produced with any printing technology that allows sequential bar code or other indicia production. The indicia 14 is the same on every stamp 10 in each sheet 12 or 12A.

The stamps 10, if preferred, can bear an expiration date such that the stamps 10 cannot be used after the expiration date. This date can be incorporated in the indicia 14 on the stamp such that the stamps 10 will not validate a coupon after an established date. Upon expiration of the stamps 10, new stamps can be sent to the individual or household depending on a variety of factors, such as the extent of use of the stamps 10 by the household or individual.

The stamps 10 can be distributed in several different ways. For example, a sheet 12 of stamps 10 each bearing the same indicia 14 that is matched to a specific individual or family on a mailing list is delivered to the specific individual or family. The stamps 10 include an adhesive backing, such as a peel-off or moistureable glue. The sheets 12 of stamps 10 are delivered to each individual or household identified by the indicia 14, either alone or with coupons or other material in a mailing.

The stamps 10 are used to reduce the price of a product purchased with a coupon 16 bearing a stamp 10. If desired, additional incentives can be provided with the use of the stamps 10. For example, payment could be made for use of the stamps 10. Another incentive is a bonus for the use of all the stamps 10.

To use the stamps 10, the individual or household applies a single stamp 10 to any coupon 16 specifically printed to be validated by a stamp 10. The individual or member of the household then purchases the product identified on the coupon 16 and receives a reduction in the cost of the product in accordance with the terms on the coupon.

The number of coupons 16 redeemed with a stamp 10 affixed to them can be counted to maintain an accurate count of the number of stamps used. This reduces the likelihood of fraud.

The second sheet of stamps 12A differs from the first sheet 12 by the inclusion of an information panel 18. The second sheet of stamps 12A is provided to stores which issue the sheet of stamps 12A to shoppers who do not have stamps 10 with them.

The information panel 18 includes indicia 14A corresponding to the indicia 14 printed on the stamps 10 in the sheet 12A. An individual shopper provides his or her identity, such as name and address, in the panel 18. The panel 18 is removed by the store and the shopper's information and the indicia 14A are entered into a database. The shopper may then apply the stamps 10 on coupons 16 and redeem them at the cash register. The information regarding the stamps 10 and who used them can then be tracked once the information from panel 18 is entered into the database. Also, withholding all or partial payment based on the use of stamps until the information panel 18 had been entered into the database would reduce fraud.

A coupon 16 with a stamp 10 affixed to it can be redeemed in one of several ways. The simplest method of redemption is using current system centers that handle coupons and keep track of the numbers to bill the promoters. In these centers scanners can be used to read the indicia 14 on the stamps 10 affixed to the coupons 16. At the same time a bar code or other code 17 on the coupon 16 identifying the product associated with the coupon 16 can be read. The scanners permit the coupons 16 to be matched to the original database used in the mailing of the stamps 10. In addition, store information could be collected in the database since the coupons would be read in batches from each store. This information provides a demographic file useful in determining demographic trends.

Redemption can also be done at the point of purchase with either existing scanners or scanners that are supplied to the stores utilizing an online

system. Each store has access to information on redeemers with excessive redemptions and can, for example, confiscate the coupons or notify other parties to reduce fraud.

If an expiration date of the stamps 10 is used, new stamps are distributed to selected individuals on a mailing list based on past stamp usage, fraudulent usage studies, marketing plans or any other method that is compatible with the data collection and analysis procedures. Preferably, each new mailing would include stamps with a design different from earlier stamps, such as a different background color, but the new stamps need not have the same unique indicia 14 as in the previous mailing. Instead, the database could keep track of all indicia 14 associated with each household.

There are also other forms of distribution of the stamps 10 and coupons 16. For example, freestanding inserts can be utilized in addition to or as replacement for mailings. Using this method of distribution, a sheet 12A of stamps 10 is provided as a freestanding insert in a magazine, catalog or similar item. The recipient validates the sheet 12A by bringing the sheet 12A to a store for validation. In this situation, the recipient would not receive the value of a stamped coupons until the redemption center had entered the label 18 into a database. Once that is completed, the recipient receives a check or money for all coupons redeemed.

The method of the present invention can now be described with reference to Fig. 4 which illustrates the steps of the inventive method. Beginning with the first step 20, a sheet of stamps 12 or 12A is produced. Once produced, each stamp 10 in each sheet 12 or 12A is marked in step 22 with a specific identifying indicia, such as a bar code 14. Once each stamp 10 has been coded, the sheets 12 or 12A can be distributed in one of two ways. The first way is to validate the sheets 12 in step 24 by associating the specific indicia 14 with a household or individual. Once this is accomplished, the validated sheets 12 are sent to the user in step 26.

An alternative way of distributing the sheets 12A is to send a sheet of stamps 12A in step 26 to a store or to an individual through the use of freestanding inserts or similar means of distribution. The user in step 30 completes the information panel 18 and brings the sheet 12A to a store. The store validates the stamps in step 32 by removing the information panel 18. The information on panel 18 is then recorded in a database.

Regardless of how the stamps 10 are distributed and validated, the user then affixes or secures individual stamps 10 to coupons 16 in step 34. Once the stamps 10 have been secured to the selected coupons 16, in step 36 the coupons 16 can be redeemed upon purchasing goods associated with those coupons 16. The redemption cen-

ters read the indicia 14 on the stamps 10 in step 38, and this data is stored in a database in step 40. Or, in the alternative, after the stamps 10 are secured to the coupons 16 in step 34, the coupons 16 are redeemed at a store in step 36A, but instead of receiving cash or a price reduction, the user is given a credit. The redeemed coupon is then read and validated in step 38A and the data is stored in a database in step 40. Upon the passage of a period of time such as a month, or upon the accumulation of a predetermined amount of credit, a check is issued to the user for the accumulated value of the redeemed coupons 16. In another alternative, in step 42 the redemption center can also read identifying codes on all of the products purchased by the user at the same time the coupons 16 are used. The data read from the additional goods are then placed in the database in step 40. Once this information has been stored in the database, a variety of analyses can be performed.

The method of the present invention, as illustrated in Fig. 4 provides several benefits including the ability to track coupons to specific households or individuals, the reduction of fraud associated with the redemption of coupons, the establishment and maintenance of a database of coupon purchases by brand and by product, the potential for developing a database of other products purchased at the same time as the coupons are redeemed, and the capability of eliminating deliveries of coupons to non-responsive recipients are also possible.

Claims

1. A method of tracking purchasers of articles who use an item, such as a coupon, in a purchase, comprising the steps of:

producing a set of identifiers;

marking each identifier in said set with a specific identifying indicia;

providing said marked set of identifiers to a user associated with said specific identifying indicia;

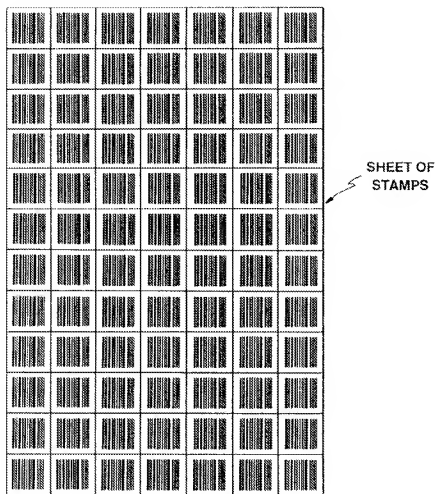
instructing said user to secure at least one of said identifiers to an item such as a coupon and to obtain a first article using said item; and

reading said identifying indicia.

2. The method of tracking claimed in claim 1 wherein said identifying indicia on each said identifier identifies said user.

3. The method of tracking claimed in claim 1 wherein said item identifies said first article. marking each stamp with an alpha-numeric code.
4. The method of tracking claimed in claim 1 further comprising the step of recording said identifying indicia in a database. 5
5. The method of tracking claimed in claim 1 wherein said identifying indicia comprises bar code. 10
6. The method of tracking claimed in claim 1 further comprising the step of reading into a database other articles purchased at the same time as said first article. 15
7. The method of tracking claimed in claim 1 further comprising the step of establishing an expiration date for said identifiers. 20
8. The method of tracking claimed in claim 1 further comprising the step of validating each said set of identifiers.
9. A method of identifying users of coupons, comprising the steps of: 25
 - preparing a set of stamps:
 - marking each stamp in said set of stamps with the same identifier, said identifier corresponding to a specific user; 30
 - providing said specific user with said set of marked stamps; 35
 - instructing said specific user to secure one of said marked stamps to any coupon obtained by said user and to redeem said coupon with said stamp secured thereto; and 40
 - reading said identifier into a database.
10. The method of identifying users of coupons set forth in claim 9 further comprising the step of recording the identity of goods purchased with each coupon with a marked stamp and the identity of other goods purchased at the same time by said specific user. 45
11. The method of identifying users of coupons set forth in claim 9 wherein said step of marking each stamp in said set of stamps comprises marking each stamp with a bar code. 50
12. The method of identifying users of coupons set forth in claim 9 wherein said step of marking each stamp in said set of stamps comprises 55
13. The method of identifying users of coupons set forth in claim 9 further comprising the steps of establishing a date of expiration of said set of marked stamps, and preparing a second set of stamps to be marked and provided to said specific user after the expiration of said set of marked stamps.
14. The method of identifying users of coupons set forth in claim 9 further comprising the step of validating said marked set of stamps before use by said specific user.

FIG.1



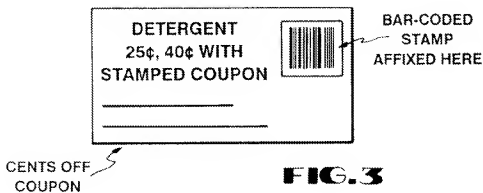
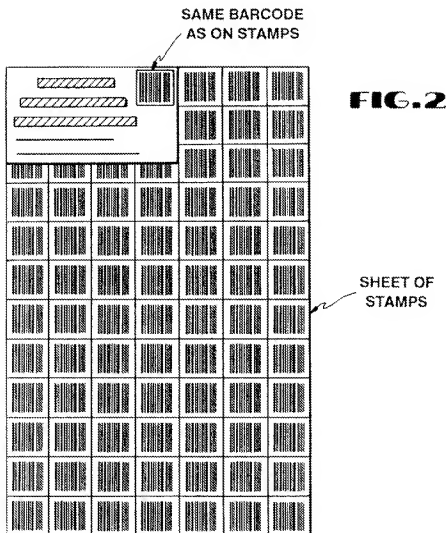
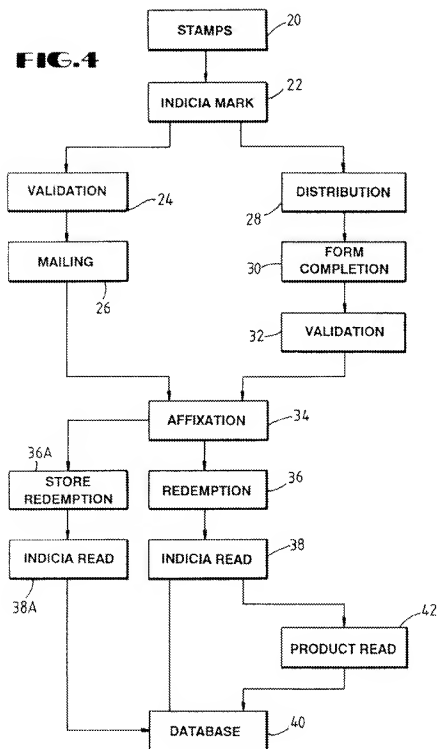


FIG. 4



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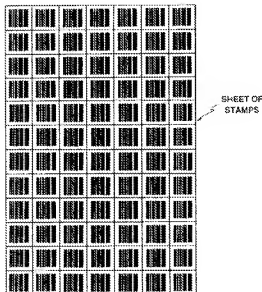
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(54) **Method of identifying users of coupons.**

(67) A method of identifying users of coupons includes marking a set of stamps with a code that identifies a particular user. The stamps are then distributed to the user identified by the code, and the user is instructed to secure a stamp on each coupon the user redeems when making purchases. The code is then read and entered into a database along with the identity of the item purchased.

FIG.1



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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number

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DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim
X	US-A-4 908 761 (TAI) * column 6, line 4 - column 7, line 19; claims 1,4,6,9,16; figure 3 *	1-14
Y	US-A-1 592 931 (FRITSCH) * page 2, line 1 - line 18 *	1-3 8-10,12, 14
Y,D	EP-A-0 354 260 (C.P.C. INVESTMENT TRUST) * abstract; claims 1,9-16 *	1-3 8-10,12, 14 4-7,11
A	US-A-3 890 599 (SIMJIAN) * the whole document *	1,9
A	DE-A-2 823 509 (BENZLER) * page 4, line 16 - page 5, line 17; claims 1,4 *	1,9
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims		TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.5) G06F G07G G06K G07D A47F G07B
Place of search THE HAGUE	Date of completion of the search 27 JULY 1993	Examiner GUIVOL O.
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